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**May 18, 2004**

**SUBJECT: ENHANCING COMMUNITY LINKAGES WITH THE SUNNYVALE  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY**

**REPORT IN BRIEF**

The purpose of this report is to provide the Council with information gained through a project that was approved as a study issue in FY 2002/03 on the subjects of communications skills training and building community trust. The approved work plan proposed to evaluate ways to increase communication between community members and the Sunnyvale Department of Public Safety. As anticipated, the study recommended actions DPS can take to improve communication, build trust and increase knowledge in the community about public safety operations. While the Department of Public Safety maintains a reputation for excellence and a high satisfaction rating from the community (currently at 94%) the recommendations provide alternatives that may allow us to connect with otherwise unreachable community members primarily through technology and media. Staff, in response to other questions raised in the original study issue, is also providing a summary of the training provided to department members in the areas of communications and diversity as well as department statistics pertaining to diversity, demographics, equipment and technology.

**BACKGROUND**

In 2002, the Department of Public Safety undertook a study issue to study the critical communication skills training and building of community trust within Public Safety. (Attachment A) The key elements of the issue were to study the interpersonal communications training officers receive in dealing with people who present potential safety and flight risks to officers and the extent of community trust of the department along with improvement opportunities.

This project has spanned two fiscal years with funds carried over in the project budget. One reason for the extended time period is that the original draft report submitted by the consultant did not address all of the areas outlined in the scope of work. Another is that due to staff changes within Public Safety the project has been reassigned more than once. Staff currently assigned to the project worked with the consultants to address areas of concern.

**EXISTING POLICY**

## Law Enforcement Sub-Element

4.1A.4 Reduce crime and fear by strengthening the police/community partnership.

4.1C.1 Provide for assessment of changing community needs and expectations.

### **DISCUSSION**

The first element of the study issue was to study the interpersonal communications training officers receive in dealing with people who present potential safety and flight risks to officers.

In terms of training and training opportunities, the Department of Public Safety provides an enormous amount of training to its employees every year in an effort to maintain all required certifications. In addition to the basic training all members of the department receive, each officer receives training specifically relating to interpersonal communication. This training begins for the new officer in the Police Academy and continues on through his or her career.

In the Police Academy, recruits receive instruction on topics specifically relating to the topic of interpersonal communications. These include:

Community Relations – 6 hours

Victimology/Crisis Intervention – 7 hours

Cultural Diversity – 25 hours

Handling Disputes – 7 hours

In addition to these specific classes, the topic of interpersonal communication permeates much of the other training they receive. For example, recruits receive seventy-two hours of instruction relating to Arrest & Control/Baton use, over ten hours relating to crowd control and over one hundred hours in firearms instruction. While much of this course work deals with the physical aspects of the tasks represented, present throughout, is how to employ the techniques being learned within the "use of force" continuum. Communication is critical for success in these operations and is the first level of force on the continuum. Not only is there an attempt to teach recruits how to control a situation with minimal force, but ideally control a situation before force is ever needed through clear communication efforts.

In the Field Training Officer (FTO) program, recruits receive additional communication training that the Department has identified above and beyond what is given in the Police Academy. This training includes blocks of instruction on dealing with persons suffering from mental health issues and further instruction relating to use of force, arrest and control techniques, firearms and less-lethal weapons specific to Sunnyvale.

During the FTO program, recruits are given further training, while at the same time being evaluated as to how

they perform what they have learned. Blocks of instruction received at this level include dealing with the mentally ill, mediating civil disputes, dealing with critical incidents and "in progress calls." They also receive instruction on dealing with interpersonal communications in their work environment relating to officer conduct and harassment.

The Department continually trains its officers in methods of dealing with the public both in volatile encounters and routine contacts. Since January 1, 2002, the Department provided 985 student hours of instruction relating to arrest and control techniques, 624 student hours relating to hostage and crisis negotiations, 656 student hours in defensive tactics, 224 student hours using the Force Option Simulator, a firearms training tool, and 2653 student hours dealing with harassment discrimination and retaliation. In addition to these specific topics, there are literally thousands of hours worth of instruction where communication skills are woven into the fabric of the course content.

Public Safety is unique in that its officers are trained in police, fire and EMS duties. The EMS training that they receive includes an intensive level of medical instruction. As part of this instruction, they are exposed to and taught to deal with, people suffering from medical issues that can cause aberrant behavior. This greater depth of understanding of communication problems with members of the public who have medical issues allows Public Safety Officers a unique perspective in the field.

The department prides itself on staying aware of training trends, especially in the areas of tactical and interpersonal communication. We provide officers with, and train them to use modern equipment to facilitate information gathering and sharing. Our policies and procedures are carefully reviewed to be consistent with law enforcement industry standards.

The department has addressed professional conduct and responsibilities of its officers as they relate to dealing with the public and each other within Chapter 4.1 of the Department General Orders Manual (DGOM). The policy seeks to stress the importance of maintaining fair and impartial attitudes towards all persons coming to their attention; this is extremely important in establishing a trusting relationship within the community. Appropriate use of force is covered in Chapter 4.12 of the DGOM which stresses the escalation of force, including verbal control of situations.

In addition to policies covering the actions of officers, the Department equips its members with weapons, equipment, and restraining devices to be used as tools for de-escalating confrontational situations. These tools include less lethal munitions, pepper spray, protective shields, as well as less obvious tools such as cell phones to allow for in-the-field contact with translation services to improve communications. The Department has a live translation service available. This service is available twenty-four hours per day to assist in communication with people speaking most any language encountered in our community.

The level of community trust and ways to improve it forms the second element of this study issue. Without trust, members of the community would be reluctant to involve the police when they are victims of crimes, and they would be unlikely to call the police to mediate their disputes or to step forward as a witness to a crime. Without a foundation of trust, the police are left with few opportunities to impact crime and disorder. In Sunnyvale deep-rooted trust levels have enabled us to enjoy some of the lowest crime rates and highest safety ratings in the country.

Building and supporting strong community organizations such as neighborhood associations can sustain and improve both level of trust and satisfaction with City services. Public Safety provides support for these organizations with coordination for department support out of our Community Safety Services Bureau. As referenced in the Police Executive Research Forum report attached, it can be very difficult to generate sustained interest in these organizations. Public Safety can help our community organize into such groups most successfully when the community is pulled together by a specific issue or cause. As grass roots groups come together, Public Safety can demonstrate the value of keeping the group together on an ongoing basis by supporting and facilitating communication between the City and interested groups through the coordination and support of Community Safety Services.

Since it is difficult to build such organizations, it is important that Public Safety support the organizations that already exist. Beyond geographically based organizations such as neighborhood associations, Public Safety can improve on our communication and trust with the community by supporting and receiving feedback on performance from interest based organizations. Organizations such as school Parent Teacher Associations, the Moffet Park security group, the Los Padres Parents Association, the Sunnyvale Amateur Radio group, Kiwanis, the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, Leadership Sunnyvale, Elks, and other similar groups can provide this feedback.

Facilitating communication with the public is also accomplished in subtle ways. One of these ways is to have the demographics of the department more closely mirror the population it serves. The Department of Public Safety has sought to increase the hiring of minority and female candidates without a reduction in quality of the officers produced. In the period of FY 98/99 to FY 03/04 Public Safety has hired 144 new officers. The demographics of these new hires are as follows:

84% Male

16% Female

48% Caucasian

22% Hispanic

22% Asian

5% Black

3% Other

This hiring has resulted in changes in the demographics of the department. A snapshot of the department's progress looks like this:

July 1998: April 2004:

98% Male 92% Male

2% Female 8% Female

87% Caucasian 71% Caucasian

4% Hispanic 12% Hispanic

5% Asian 13% Asian

4% Black 2% Black

1% Other 2% Other

Public Safety believes that the best practices in public safety service delivery are most accurately described as "Community Oriented Public Safety." This concept combines the best practices of Community Oriented Policing, Fire Service best practices, Problem Oriented Policing, and modern Emergency Medical Services delivery. Public Safety has an effective specialized team of Neighborhood Resource Officers that models this concept. The next step is to implement and integrate Community Oriented Public Safety in all police, fire and EMS line operations, not just in specialized units.

In communicating service trends and outcomes to the community, Public Safety can not rely on any one method or style of communication. Effective communication of information begins with successful internal communication within the City. Every Council member and every member of the Department must be adequately informed to respond to community questions and concerns.

Public Safety must consistently use media outlets to communicate with the public while utilizing community organizations described above as "portals" for two-way communications. "Piggybacking" Public Safety information onto communication devices of the City such as the quarterly report and Public Access Channel as well as geographic and interest based community publications such as PTA reports, Neighborhood Association Newsletters, Chamber of Commerce newsletters and similar publications can be an effective and efficient manner of communication to our community. Increased utilization of the internet as a two way communication tool is a significant trend and must be increasingly used to communicate between DPS and our broad community.

Continued and improved communication with the community will increase opportunity for community members to comment on officer performance, both positive and negative. Increased utilization of the internet may provide increased two way communication of department and officer performance in multiple languages. The department's desire for performance input should be clear in every communication channel we utilize including personal appearances in the community as well as print and television media. Improving community knowledge base and methods of contacting the department is a message that should not require a separate communication channel, but rather is a message that should be consistent and common in interactions with the community in every communication channel.

By all measures, Sunnyvale DPS deserves the already high level of trust invested in it by the community. A high rate of community satisfaction and a low level of complaint combine to paint a very bright picture of the

regard and trust between our department and the community it serves.

Three elements stand out as keys to maintaining or building community trust:

- The community must have confidence that officers are properly prepared to deal with volatile circumstances where they engage potentially violent or uncooperative people. The public should take comfort in knowing that their officers are aptly schooled, trained and equipped with the most up-to-date humanitarian techniques available to diffuse even the most volatile situations.
- Of equal importance is an accessible and open process available for members of the community to raise its concerns about police performance. The public must be confident that should they have questions or concerns about either overall department performance or the performance of an individual officer, there would be ample opportunities to objectively investigate those concerns. If warranted, the community must be assured that appropriate follow-up or corrective action will result. Likewise, the community should be aware of the processes in effect for the department to proactively review officer performance within a system of continuous improvement.
- Perhaps most importantly, the department and the community need to continuously explore opportunities to improve their relationship so that greater understanding and trust will result. Neighborhoods and communities of interest should have ready and regular opportunities for dialogue with the Department so that enforcement priorities, expectations, problems and opportunities can be identified and pursued. This lies at the heart of Community Public Safety, and allows for the broadest base of accountability; accountability directly to those served.

Using those three elements, The Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) was retained to review the relationship between the Sunnyvale Department of Public Safety and the community it serves. The focus was on the Police Services or the Patrol function of the department. The two phased study produced a report that is attached for further review if desired,(Attachment B) and makes twelve recommendations that staff has reviewed carefully.

PERF's study was done in two phases. The first included interviews within the department and the city to gain their perspective on the department's relationship with the community. The second involved a series of community focus groups to gather community opinions and expectations regarding the department's police function.

The information gathered from the internal interviews was of no surprise. We are confident in our abilities to provide high quality service in a professional manner. There is no question that the community is diverse, and that our officers need to be mindful of the diversity in their daily business. Overall, the department is proud of the relationship it maintains with the community it serves and we understand that our relationship is built on trust. We look for opportunities to improve our understanding of the different cultural needs of the people we serve and in turn learn to work together to maintain our reputation as a desirable place to live and work, subject, of course, to practical restrictions on language skills and budget constraints.

The community focus groups presented a challenge for staff. Repeated attempts by city and public safety staff

to set up focus groups to discuss the issues of communication and community trust were met with "I don't have time." and "I'm not really interested." Staff finally used a contract marketing firm to assemble suitable groups. The issues discussed during the focus groups fell under four broad categories: Community Perspectives; Perspectives on Policing in the Community; Police Visibility; and Outreach Mechanisms. Again, the feedback received was not surprising. Participants acknowledged being very busy people who have little time to devote to community programs or activities. They are generally satisfied with the services they receive and are interested in being kept informed through the existing outreach efforts like the "Quarterly Report", but see no need to engage in programs offered by the city or the Department of Public Safety.

PERF makes twelve recommendations on how to improve community-police interaction and trust. It is important to note that this project was begun prior to the onset of the cities current financial situation.

#### Consultant Recommendations:

- **The department should reexamine the role of its patrol officers since most of the interaction residents have with the police stem from calls for service.**

Though this recommendation goes on to explain that staffing is such that patrol can and does respond to assist with fire calls it generally encourages the patrol officer to become more involved with people during routine patrol functions. This is in fact what Public Safety does encourage. Officers spend a great deal of time during "routine patrol" engaging community members, following up on issues, and in general getting to know residents and what they can do to better meet their needs.

- **The police should make much greater use of the Department of Public Safety's web site as a way to provide information to the community.**

Public Safety staff concurs with this recommendation, subject to available resources to upgrade the City's web-site.

- **The department should consider creating an on-line Citizens Police Academy.**

Public Safety does not concur with this recommendation. Staff contends that the most valuable part of a Citizens Police Academy is the face to face contact and the relationships that are built between officers and the community. To host this type of program on-line would significantly lessen the impact because the message we are trying to send is as much about the people of Public Safety and how and why we do what we do as it is about policies and procedures.

- **The department should create its own newsletter and issue it with the city's Quarterly Report.**

The department does submit articles to be published in the Quarterly Report. To create an entire separate

publication is not something we have had the time or staff to consider, nor does the city encourage a non-coordinated dissemination of this type of information.

- **The department should look into developing programming in multiple languages for the local cable channel.**

This is another resource intensive recommendation. Both DPS and Information Technology do not have staff to dedicate to such an effort, not to mention the external support it would require for the language and/or translation services. Staff has and will continue to look at this opportunity to get Public Service messages out and/or use it as a wide spread notification system.

- **The department should expand its presence in the print media.**

Since the time of the consultant's visit and the focus groups, Public Safety has worked closely with the Office of the City Manager to raise our profile in the local print media. We have not had much opportunity to branch out to non-English papers but continue to look for opportunities to do so, through the city's Public Information Officer.

- **Public Safety should use the library as a place for outreach to the community.**

This recommendation has been passed along to staff in the Neighborhood Resource Unit as well as to our recruitment team. Provided the Library is amenable to our presence this should be a relatively low cost/ minimal resource investment in increasing our exposure.

- **The department should upgrade the police booth at the Annual Art and Wine Festival, and other local events.**

Staff is looking at ways to improve our presence at these events, upgrading the booth is one we are costing out. We are also looking at increasing our staff presence both formally and informally. Public Safety participates in many of the local events and even hosts a few that are very well received such as the Pancake Breakfast and the Health and Safety Fair.

- **The department should incorporate mandatory and cross-cultural training in its in-service curriculum every year.**

Public Safety staff is required to maintain certification that entails hours of mandatory training in all disciplines, police, fire and medical services. Our current in-service curriculum is full of training that is required to keep our staff certified. We do, however, take advantage of every opportunity to provide training in communication and diversity. This year for example our staff has attended a special workshop on



interpersonal communication and hostile work environments, with emphasis on how important it is to be sensitive to personal differences. We continually provide our supervisors with discussion materials to be used as informal training opportunities in the form of staff meetings/briefings on topics pertaining to cross-cultural awareness and communications.

- **The department should implement a specific policy on racially biased policing.**

Although the department does not have an entire policy dedicated to Racially Biased Policing, as PERF recommends, the Department General Orders Manual Chapter Four, Section 4.1.04 Impartial Attitude, specifically states in part that, "Employees shall not exhibit partiality for or against a person because of race, creed or influence or interfere in the private business of others when not in the interest of justice." We have, however, reviewed PERF's recommended policy and are working with the management team to determine the best way to implement it within Public Safety's existing guidelines.

- **The department should consider implementing a monitoring system for vehicle and pedestrian stops.**

Staff is reviewing this as part of implementing the recommended policy from PERF. We must evaluate existing technologies and necessary changes in data collection procedures to determine if this will be feasible and cost effective with little added workload in light of already strained resources.

- **The department should consider creating a multi-cultural police advisory committee to meet quarterly with the Director of Public Safety.**

This idea, although it has merit, is not something the department can consider at this time. Until we have solidified the department's structure, personnel, and the roles each member is assigned, staff does not believe it would be prudent to host this type of forum.

The opportunity to have an organization as esteemed as PERF work with our department has been an honor. We are proud that their evaluations further reinforce that we are a high performing, well regarded, organization that has strong relationships with the community it serves. Again, the entire report has been attached for further review if desired.

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

The original budget amount in Project 823630 was \$40,000. Provided we are not given other direction, staff intends to return the unspent amount of \$9,470 to the general fund. If Council should decide to implement any of the consultant recommendations, there could potentially be a significant fiscal impact.

## **PUBLIC CONTACT**

Public contact was made through posting of the Council agenda on the city's official notice bulletin board, posting of the agenda and report on the city's web page, publication of the Council agenda in the San Jose Mercury News, and the availability of this on the source report in the Department of Public Safety.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

1. Accept the report without further direction.
2. Accept the report and provide specific direction to pursue one or more of the recommendations made by the consultant, providing staff the opportunity to evaluate the fiscal impact and report back.
3. Do not accept the report and provide specific desired direction.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

In light of the fiscal implications of the recommendations, staff recommends alternative #1, accept the report without further direction.

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## **Attachments**

1. [Council Study Issue Worksheet](#) (pdf format)
2. Report: [Enhancing Community Linkages-Sunnyvale Department of Public Safety by The Police Executive Research Forum](#)

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